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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Agricultural Research Administration
Bureau of Animal Industry

Reserve

ENFORCEMENT OF FOOT-AND-MOUTH DISEASE QUARANTINE ON THE
UNITED STATES-MEXICAN BORDER

Reserve

The outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease in Mexico late in 1946, together with the continued presence of the disease there, has directed much public attention to the international border as a possible route by which that devastating livestock plague might invade the United States. Ever since the outbreak, there have been varied public expressions of opinion on the degree of danger together with recommendations to the U. S. Department of Agriculture on measures for strengthening border defenses.

In its periodic reports on developments in the campaign in Mexico the U. S. Department of Agriculture has included frequent references to the protective measures being taken at the international border. Continued public interest in the subject has suggested this more comprehensive statement on the character of the quarantine and its enforcement.

Authority for the Quarantine

The present quarantine on the international border is based on Federal legislation that applies also to quarantine measures in effect at seaboard ports with respect to other countries where foot-and-mouth disease exists.

Under Federal statutes prior to the passage of the 1930 Tariff Act, the decision whether to impose or remove quarantines on importations of livestock and their products from foreign countries was discretionary with the Secretary of Agriculture. The Tariff Act of 1930, however, included an absolute prohibition against the importation, into the United States, of designated animals and products from countries where foot-and-mouth disease or rinderpest exists, as determined and announced by the Secretary of Agriculture.

In accordance with the mandate of the Tariff Act, the Secretary of Agriculture imposed the quarantine on importations of specified animals and products from Mexico promptly after the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease in that country.

Prohibited and Admissible Animals and Products

The same Tariff Act and previous animal-quarantine legislation authorized the Secretary of Agriculture to make rules and regulations for quarantine enforcement and to prescribe the terms and conditions under which animals, meat, and other product may be refused admission or destroyed if they enter the United States illegally. Those conditions are set forth concisely in the Department's regulations designated as B. A. I. Orders 371 and 373. The principal prohibited animals and products are: Cattle, sheep, other domestic ruminants, and swine; the fresh, chilled, or frozen meat of such animals; meat or product derived from wild ruminants or swine, and garbage from prohibited foreign meats or meat products. The importation of organs, glands, extracts, or secretions of ruminants

or swine is permitted under restrictions designed to render them safe. Cured meats and dressed poultry are excluded unless prepared in a specified manner to make them safe. An amendment to B. A. I. Order 373, promulgated July 25, 1947, made special provision for the prompt destruction or other immediate safe disposition of prohibited animals or products coming into the country in an irregular manner, as by straying across land borders or by smuggling.

The Department's regulations are based on the modern knowledge of veterinary science and are necessarily within the authority of the basic legislation. For many years Bureau of Animal Industry officials, who advise the Secretary of Agriculture on such matters, have sought, when drafting veterinary restrictions for a specified purpose, to keep them from being unreasonable, or from needlessly restricting legitimate business and commerce. For instance, the regulations permit the entry of hides, skins, and glands for pharmaceutical purposes when shipped under seal to an establishment approved by the Bureau for the proper sanitary handling of the product. Among the products which are admitted without restrictions are clean hair and wool, as well as clean dry bones, horns, and hoofs. No case of foot-and-mouth disease has ever been traced to the importation of those byproducts.

The regulations do not prohibit the entry of horses into the United States, but when such animals come from an area where infection is present or suspected, the Department's inspectors require the thorough cleaning and disinfecting of the legs and feet of the horses, together with all buckets, curry combs, blankets, and other gear that accompanied them. Disinfection extends also to the immediate premises where the horses are held when inspected.

Conditions sometimes arise in which popular sentiment seems to urge measures that far exceed the limits of safety and sound judgment. In one outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease in the United States a local authority applied a quarantine to clay pigeons - an obviously ridiculous measure. Even though public opinion might temporarily support unreasonable requirements, Bureau officials believe that the public would soon lose faith in an organization that sponsored regulations having no scientific or other sound justification.

Nature of Border Patrol

In January 1947, soon after foot-and-mouth disease appeared in Mexico, the Department took measures to strengthen and tighten the border defenses. Surveys by experienced quarantine officers led to an augmented border patrol comprising, by the end of 1947, about 325 employees. The present number, in June 1948, is about 600. This force patrols the border in two shifts of 7 hours each, 7 days a week. At critical points 24-hour, or around-the-clock, supervision is provided. Some of the men on the forces were formerly in the employ of border states on similar duties, or were men with experience as Customs or local law enforcement agents.

The personnel now on duty has been very carefully selected with special reference to dependability, resourcefulness, good judgment, knowledge of livestock, and horsemanship. Most of the range riders and supervisory inspectors are intimately familiar not only with livestock but also with the type of

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country to which they are assigned, including the habits and customs of the people. Many of the men on the force speak Spanish. The range riders use horses almost entirely. The foremen use chiefly cars or jeeps but must also have horse trailers attached to their motor vehicles so that they can cover more mileage in level areas and yet have a horse when necessary to travel in rough terrain. As a still further aid in maintaining the patrol, reconnaissance by airplane has proved valuable and is in constant use along the eastern end of the border.

The border patrol is directed by a chief supervisor, assisted by district supervisors, all of whom are experienced in quarantine work relating to foot-and-mouth disease.

Camps are located at strategic points along the boundary to accommodate the employees that patrol the various sectors. Part of the boundary trail is mountainous and rocky; other parts are through sandy desert. At several of the camps it is necessary to transport water for the employees and their horses over distances of from 5 to 38 miles.

Employees of the Bureaus of Customs, and Entomology and Plant Quarantine at designated ports of entry are familiar with the requirements of the Bureau of Animal Industry. Through their cooperation in carrying out these requirements it has been necessary for Bureau of Animal Industry representatives to make only check inspections at such ports of entry. However, at a limited number of recognized ports of entry, Bureau representatives aid in the inspection of vehicular traffic entering the United States, and also the baggage of tourists, immigrants, and others who may have prohibited meat, animal by-products, hay or straw, or materials which might introduce the virus of foot-and-mouth disease into this country.

The number of animals, including cattle, sheep, swine, and goats found to enter the United States illegally, since the establishment of the present patrol, has ranged between about 10 to 170 monthly. An increase in these numbers in recent months is attributed chiefly to drought conditions in Northern Mexico. Apparently more animals than usual have sought the water of the Rio Grande River and then continued across. The destruction of these animals has brought about the private building of approximately 100 miles of fencing on the Mexican side of the Rio Grande River. Some smuggling has been detected and the animals and meat are seized and destroyed. Animals that enter illegally are killed and their carcasses buried or burned in accordance with the regulations.

In recent months aerial surveys of activities on the border from Brownsville to a point near the Big Bend area in Texas have been helpful in enforcing the quarantine. Observations of unusual movements or collections of livestock on the Mexican side, or other conditions which appear to bear close checking, are reported to the ground forces. The camps of the range riders in this area are distinctively marked. Information in the form of written messages is dropped from the plane in specially constructed cloth bags. Reports from supervisors show that air reconnaissance of the border is of distinct value.

The impartiality of quarantine enforcement merits comment. Under the law, the Department's enforcement officers are required to destroy designated kinds of animals that enter the United States from a country where foot-and-mouth

disease exists. Cattle, swine, sheep, and goats are specifically designated and Mexico is now listed among the countries where the Secretary of Agriculture has determined this disease to exist. So if a cow, for instance, wanders from the United States across the international border and later returns to the United States, that animal, having been in Mexico, must be destroyed. It has the same status, under the law, as a cow raised in Mexico would have, if it entered the United States.

In the course of quarantine enforcement along the border, numerous incidents, in addition to livestock inspection, show the need for continued watchfulness. For instance, the baggage of persons entering the United States has been found to contain fresh meat and even bloody spears used in bull-fights in Mexico. To remind persons who visit Mexico, and then return to the United States, of the danger of such articles to the United States, the Department will issue shortly a small pamphlet describing foot-and-mouth disease and the precautions to be taken.

Protective Fencing Needed

Especially along border areas where large numbers of cattle graze on open range there has been urgent need for more fencing to help prevent the movement of Mexican animals into the United States by straying. Through the cooperation of the International Boundary and Water Commission and the National Park Service with the Bureau of Animal Industry, the construction of some additional fencing to prevent drifting of livestock has been assured. It should help to make the border patrol in that sector more effective. Proposals to construct along appropriate portions of the entire border, a substantial fence strong enough to stop cattle, tight enough to exclude pigs and other small animals, and high enough to exclude most jumping animals such as deer, have met with varied public reactions. Such a fence, to be effective, should be about 7 feet high, with the lower portion of woven wire and the upper portion consisting of several strands of barbed wires. The main advantage of such a fence would be its material aid, in quarantine enforcement as a barrier to livestock, and wild animals that might carry the infection of foot-and-mouth disease. It would supplement the services of men on patrol duties and tend to discourage attempts at smuggling of animals and prohibited products across the border, especially at night.

Some objections have been raised to fencing of the kind proposed, but its value in safeguarding the extensive livestock industry of the United States appears greatly to outweigh objections. Most of them involve local problems that can be solved by careful planning of the location and character of the fencing. As evidence of the practicability and value of such fencing it is noteworthy that, in recent years, private livestock interests in both the United States and Mexico have constructed many miles of fencing on both sides of the border at their own expense.

Prompt Reporting Important

As a final comment on the border quarantine situation, there is always the possibility that in spite of every precaution, some infective virus may gain access to the United States by land, sea, or air at some point along its extensive land and water boundaries. Department officials are confident that, though highly infective, foot-and-mouth disease can be quickly eradicated if detected promptly. Abundant evidence supports this view. The public can be of great help in protecting the country against this disease by reporting any suspected sign of it at once to the nearest county, State, or Federal veterinary or livestock official by the quickest means of communication.